

WASHINGTON TIMES
27 August 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 5A

Foreign

French deny blame in Greenpeace blast

By Curtis Cate
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The French government published an official report yesterday exonerating its intelligence agency of responsibility in the July 10 bombing of the Greenpeace trawler, Rainbow Warrior, in Auckland, New Zealand.

The 29-page report was prepared by Bernard Tricot, a 65-year-old state counselor who in the 1960s was a senior member of Gen. Charles de Gaulle's presidential staff.

The report admits French intelligence agents were in the area but says they were sent to New Zealand solely on a "mission of surveillance" of Greenpeace vessels that had been assembling in Auckland harbor to take part in an anti-nuclear test demonstration.

(The Associated Press reported that New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange said today the official French report was "incredible and transparent." He hinted that the French ambassador may be expelled.

("You cannot have a form of acceptable association with another country that sets its spies on you and ignores your warrants for arrest for murder," he told a radio interviewer. He said the French report was full of inconsistencies.

("The French have a remarkable flair for getting out of New Zealand in a hurry. They've demonstrated that recently. Perhaps the same principle could apply to the diplomat," Mr. Lange said New Zealand would seek an official apology from France. "That is a minimal position," he added.)

Two French intelligence agents were apprehended by New Zealand police two days after a double mine blast crippled the Rainbow Warrior and killed a Portuguese-born Dutch photographer, Fernando Pereira. Since July 12, the two arrested agents have been held in an Auckland jail, charged with manslaughter and sabotage.

The agents, who had claimed to be a Swiss couple on a tourist trip to New Zealand's North Island, now have been formally identified in the Tricot report. Alain Turenge is in reality Maj. Alain Mafart, while his purported wife, Sophie, is Capt. Dominique Prieur, also a mem-

ber of the DGSE, Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur — the French equivalent of the CIA.

The report seeks to exonerate them of involvement in the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior — blown up by explosives apparently planted underwater — by saying Maj. Mafart gave up his frogman activities at the Aspretto training center, near Ajaccio, Corsica, two years ago, while Capt. Prieur, who has never been an underwater specialist, has long suffered from spinal problems.

The report also identifies three "yachtsmen" who set sail on June 13 from New Caledonia in the 37-foot sloop Ouvea and reached New Zealand on July 7. They are Master Sgt. Roland Verge (alias, Raymond Velche), Sgt. Gerald Andries (alias, Eric Andrenc), and Sgt. Jean-Marie Bartelo (alias, Berthelot). All are frogmen from the Aspretto training center and have long served with the DSGE — in the case of Sgt. Verge, the Ouvea's skipper, for 11 years.

The three on the yacht, according to the report, were dispatched to New Zealand on a threefold mission: to familiarize themselves with navigation problems in the South Pacific; to provide the DSGE with information about the assembling of the Greenpeace flotilla; and to study the possibility of joining such a flotilla in a boat during a future anti-nuclear test campaign.

The report does not indicate why all three men were experienced frogmen.

The document admits that instructions for various "surveillance" missions were issued at the highest levels.

The author of these instructions was the admiral who until recently directed the French nuclear-bomb testing center in the South Pacific.

In early March, he sent Defense Minister Charles Hernu a report expressing fear that the larger Greenpeace vessels might agree to stay outside of territorial limits of Mururoa and Fangatofa, while dispatching smaller boats, filled with Polynesian "independentists," to invade the two atolls.

Mr. Hernu then ordered Adm. Pierre Lacoste, head of the DSGE, to "intensify

the search for information." Later orders were issued orally, and necessary funds for a three-pronged spying offensive were allocated with the approval of Gen. Jean Saulnier, who then headed the military branch of President Francois Mitterrand's Elysee Palace secretariat. Today, Gen. Saulnier is chief of staff of the French army.

French political circles indicate that Mr. Tricot's report seems primarily designed to reassure France's secret and military services that their personnel will not be sacrificed as scapegoats.

However, other observers said the report is so full of implausibilities that it is unlikely to ward off the thunder beginning to break around the heads of the Mitterrand government.